I.F.S.W. Regional Conference

on

Action Programmes of Social Work
Organisations to Meet Present and
Emerging Social Welfare Problems

in Changing Asia

6-10 November 1967

Bengkok, Thailand
Topic I — Main challenges in social welfare in changing Asia

1. The basic framework for the discussion groups was provided by the position paper presented by Miss Silva from the Philippines. It drew attention to the demographic, economic and social trends at work in the region and the impact that they have had on thought and action in a number of fields, such as health and nutrition, education, labour, employment and training, housing and recreation, land reforms, welfare of women, youth and children.

2. There seemed to be a hard core of social problems that were common to most countries in the region; the pattern of national response to these problems also ran along relatively "traditional" lines. But many countries also possessed their own distinctive social problems which could be traced back to certain special handicaps and each country has attempted to mobilise its resources to resolve these problems.

3. For example, Hong Kong has shown energy and imagination in dealing with an influx of refugees and in finding them jobs and houses within the severely limited confines of the island. Viet Nam has had to provide for the social disorganisation that arises inevitably from a continuing war. India has built up special programmes for wide segments of the community that suffer from traditional social handicaps, the numbers involved running into 95 million people or say
20% of the total population. Australia has to provide a network of social services for a widely-scattered population and makes use of the latest equipment in keeping in touch with them.

This partial statement is only intended to drive home the point that it would be futile to attempt any generalisations for the region as a whole.

4. As problems become more complex and programmes become more ambitious, it is logical that national programmes are strengthened and supported by the efforts of international welfare agencies. If these programmes are to be effective, then the details of coordination will have to worked out carefully, the results achieved will have to be evaluated and the donor countries must be kept informed of what use has been made of their generosity. It was noted that relief was not the only end of such programmes and in some countries, a deliberate effort has been made to build up permanent community assets by using these relief supplies in "food for work" projects.

5. The high rate of growth of population was regarded as the most challenging problem in this region. Since the pace and standard of welfare services were vitally dependent on the size of the population to be served, social workers ought to take part in the formulation of policies
and programmes designed to meet the problem.

All countries in the region—though they may be at different stages of economic development—are faced with the problems of rapid urbanisation. It can be expected that in the coming years, this process will be accelerated and so it is necessary for social workers to study these problem areas and help evolve suitable solutions.

6. It seems to be generally accepted that the social worker can no longer think of providing only a direct client service in a setting of his choice; in a number of countries, the role of the social worker has been modified and expanded. It is only appropriate that he or she is drawn into the process of change and development and with their special training and expertise should play an active part in decision-making.

7. It is the general complaint that social workers are seldom heard with sympathy by planners and policy-makers and except in a few countries, they do not find a seat in these vital discussions. Perhaps, the best way to get around this situation would be for the social workers to think in terms of providing certain effective solutions for knotty problems that remain outstanding.

8. Quite often one hears the complaint that
the land performs programme has made rather disappointing progress. In one such situation, local leaders helped in building up a climate of social opinion against the practice of absentee-landlords and followed this up to the logical conclusion by the voluntary surrender of all land above a certain ceiling.

9. Another instance has been cited where social workers have taken the lead in getting tenants to care for the health and hygiene standards of a housing settlement; in other cases, parents have joined hands in running a school-feeding programme and in a number of note-worthy instances, have helped in raising productivity in industry and agriculture. There are a number of areas where such initiative has been displayed and the credit has been given to the social worker in gathering the basic social data, in organising popular participation and in implementing the individual programme.

10. A short list of the main challenges in social welfare that can be identified in changing Asia would include:

1. Development of child and youth welfare services, with special reference to the provision of educational and vocational facilities linked with job opportunities;

2. Community development programmes, with separate programmes for rural and urban communities;
3. Manpower programmes, with particular attention paid to recruitment, training and deployment;

4. Family planning, with a special role assigned within the programme to the social worker;

5. Programmes intended to cope with the problems of rapid urbanisation, and

6. Programmes that attempt to understand and deal with the changing family pattern,

**Topic II—A critical analysis of current action programmes in social welfare**

1. A country by country review of the current action programmes in social welfare operating in the region revealed that the most important common feature was the low priority attached to social welfare in the development plans. While part of the reason lay in the limited resources the Governments could spare, it was felt that there was a basic lack of conviction on the part of the national planners about the importance of social welfare in the context of growth and change. It was also realised that if the contribution of social welfare to national development was not fully appreciated by the planners, the social workers and their professional bodies were also partly responsible. The traditional preoccupation of social work with ameliorative
measures, absence of proper conceptualisation of the newer and more positive dimensions of social action, insufficient or inadequate organised communication between social workers and the power structure and absence of distinct and demonstrable results of the professional approach were among the main reasons for the low priority given to social welfare.

2. Even though social welfare had been included as a sector in the development plans of most countries, it did not necessarily imply a planned approach to programming and implementation. The ad hoc organisation of programmes to meet whatever happens to be the current emergency still seemed to characterise social welfare. A stable pattern of minimum welfare services and a perspective of expansion was not generally discernible in most countries. Such a pattern and perspective could undoubtedly provide for emergency relief and curative services as well. Examples were cited from various countries to show how the approach ranged from sporadic to planned effort. Sometimes even within the same countries, some programmes were carefully planned and others were not. This was particularly noticeable among the national, provincial and local levels and between different provinces and local authorities.

3. Another common shortcoming of social welfare programmes in most countries of the region was that they
were predominantly urban-centred. With the extension of the programmes of community development to the rural areas, some headway was being made to introduce social welfare in the villages but by and large, the efforts were uneven, grossly insufficient and ( Qualitatively poor.

4. One of the important reasons for the lack of adequate progress in social welfare was the shortage of trained social workers, both in overall numbers as well as in different categories, especially in fields such as rural and urban community development and advanced services for groups in need of special care. Most countries were trying to make good rapidly the shortages of welfare personnel by accelerating and diversifying the training programmes. However, these efforts were not based on comprehensive and accurate manpower estimates. It was necessary to urgently undertake manpower planning in social welfare and then to relate these estimates to graded and standardised training programmes accordingly.

5. Lack of coordination was cited by almost all countries as an important shortcoming of social welfare programmes. This feature was as much common between governmental and non-governmental services as it was within themselves. At the same time, examples were cited of projects and programmes in which coordination had been effected with a
measure of success. This had happened in instances where the projects were either local or specific, the autonomy of each participating agency had not been compromised and where coordination was attempted not by any external authority, but rather by representative bodies.

6. It was observed that little or no effort had been made to settle priorities among the social welfare programmes themselves. Given the limited resources, such an ordering of priorities was very essential. Social workers ought to help in deciding priorities between the handicapped groups and the underprivileged, between the young and the old, between the preventive and curative services. Wherever priorities in sequence were not possible, at least a proper balance needed to be introduced between various urgent programmes.

7. One of the crucial impacts of the development process was being felt on the family. It was felt that in most social welfare programmes in Asia, there was an awareness of the weakening of the family structure. However, the services so far introduced or planned in response fell far short of the requirements. As a result, one can only list the rising incidence of broken homes, neglected children, juvenile delinquency, vagrancy, beggary, crime and prostitution. A comprehensive family welfare service, need-based and
providing for organised social or public assistance (sometimes through charitable trusts and endowments) coupled with counselling and enabling assistance was generally lacking in the region. Experiments in a few countries have drawn attention to the potential benefits that can be gained by providing such a service.

8. Among the child welfare services, it was noticed that the age group between 1-6 years was mostly neglected in the planning of social services. After the end of the post-natal care and before entry into primary school, children were not exposed to any organised influence from the established social services like health, nutrition, physical care, play and informal education. Wherever pre-school services were established in the form of expensive kindergartens, there was a sharp contrast between them and the average primary schools. Such disparities need to be avoided. In this context, the organisation of day-care centres, creches or day-care with families were found to have relieved the burden on the families where both parents worked outside the home and also made it possible for older children to attend schools with freedom.

9. It was observed that in spite of their numerical and functional importance, most Asian countries lacked a well-defined national youth policy. Youth were
treated either as children or as adults, but never as developing young people. They were also looked upon as a resource to be harnessed to community service. Little or no thought was given to their own needs and problems. The few youth programmes that were in operation did not prioritize on the underprivileged youth, the rural youth or the young people among the urban poor.

10. In this context, the inadequacies of the educational and training programmes that could prepare youth for life and work in the developing countries was conspicuously noted. It was felt that the social welfare sector had a special responsibility to improve the employability of youth, particularly those who had fallen out of the educational system. Problems of unemployment and under-employment should cause grave concern to social workers and they should accept them as challenges which call for bold and constructive service solutions.

11. The over-emphasis on institutionalisation of social welfare services needed correction. Alternatives through strengthening the family, organisation of (non-residential) community services, foster-care, etc. need to be explored actively. It was noticed that sometimes programmes or services were copied by one country from another without a thought as to whether they had even succeeded in the country of origin or whether they were really suited to the local conditions.
12. Finally, it was emphasised that the social work profession had not given sufficient thought to the wider social challenges that had been thrown up by the development process. It was vital for the social work profession to broaden its mental horizons, take a specific stand on the current social issues, to make itself acceptable to planners and policy-makers as equal partners in the enterprise of development and lastly, to improve its own competence in discharging its growing responsibilities.

Topic III -- The Role of Social Work Organizations in Social Action

1. Social work organisations in some Asian countries participate in various aspects of social planning and action through direct participation and involvement with others in:

1. The development of social legislation and its passage affecting urban and rural populations

2. The initiation of research and demonstration projects as well as continuing research.

3. The holding of seminars and other educational programmes for the benefit of practitioners and the public toward better services.
4. The establishment of pressure groups for the purpose of promoting solutions to some problems considered urgent.

5. The development of leadership by encouraging and stimulating people to involve themselves in cooperative action.

6. The recognition of the professional and technical base necessary for sound action.

2. It was generally agreed by all discussion groups that the sound basis for preparation of the social workers depended upon a professional education system in a school of social work with knowledge and experience with related systems and the social sciences.

It was suggested that continuing education through a variety of methods was desirable and necessary for the development of social policy and action.

Groups recommended that schools should periodically review their curriculums in order to keep pace with current requirements in the field of practice.

It was noted that education in some Asian nations was patterned after systems in more developed countries which did not fit the special needs of developing nations. Where this occurs social workers are ill equipped for service to needs of the countries.
3. To be effective as individual practitioners and organisations social workers must be prepared to learn from and associate with representatives of such systems as public health, land reform, government, agriculture, education, physical planning and others. It was not reported that much of this is being done at present.

4. Considerable attention was given to the status of the social work profession and its capacity to affect, change and influence planning based upon its image.

1. Some delegates stated that the basic term "social work" was considered a barrier to the professional image but that alternative classifications were of less value.

2. Others felt it was difficult to prove the importance of social work in their countries.

3. The unification of all social workers in one organisation in nations was suggested as vital to the strengthening of the profession and the improvement of its image. It could then speak with one voice where necessary on programmes of importance.

4. Basic to the above idea is the importance to the individual social worker of his own professional identity.
5. There is the need for a strong International Federation of Social Workers which can help by facilitating communication, setting standards and clarifying goals and objectives in member countries.

Ways need to be found to be more effective and efficient with the interchange of experience, including personal contacts with colleagues in countries and opportunities for visits by officials of the Federation.

6. Basic to the improvement of "image" is the necessity for the establishment of codes of ethics, salary classification and pay plans, and the improvement of working conditions. It was felt that IFSW could help with this.

5. A number of ideas were stressed noting the role of the social work organisation———

1. It should associate itself with the community and its problems.

2. The recruitment of new, young leadership is a requirement for continued activity.

3. The association should be an innovator and not a reactor to the development of social change——It should be a leader and not a follower.
4. It should seek a planning role at all levels where social work concerns are evident.

5. There must be technically competent persons within the association who can convince other planners of the contribution social work can make to diverse social development questions and to convince decision makers that a certain decision is the best one for a particular situation.

6. The general consensus of the discussion groups was that the development of social action depended upon a continuing examination of the educational systems of social work; the strengthening of social work organisations and the rededication of individual members to the profession.

They agreed that social planning and action required a partnership with many groups which must be continually cultivated.